

## PROLOGUE

West Virginians face enormous challenges.

Rising economic inequality. Lack of economic opportunity. An opioid crisis. The barriers to a decent life created by structural racism. Climate change. An oligarchic political system where all too often, big money calls the shots. And all of this was before the election of Donald Trump, who is making all these problems worse.

We believe Americans are hungry for bold leadership. But it requires elected political leaders who put forward a vision of change, and energized people to prod them forward. The Working Families Party believes in fighting for an economy and a society in which all people can thrive. That means creating good jobs at decent wages. Investing in public goods, from schools to roads and bridges to water systems to parks. Defending the rights and safety of all people, including immigrants and people of color. The actions of our elected officials can transform people's lives.

The Working Families Party is a progressive political organization that has helped elect thousands of candidates to local, state, and federal office. We're growing across the country and working hard to elect the next generation of progressive leaders who believe our nation's government must stand for the many, not the few.

Rise Up WV is a Charleston-based grassroots political organization formed in 2017 with a vision of a political and economic system that works for everyone.

### Overview

This questionnaire contains 3 issue-based sections with questions about several issues in each section. Your answers don't have to be perfect -- just honest.

### Section 1: Contact information

Q1: First Name: **James**

Q2: Last Name: **Elam**

Q3: Email: [REDACTED]

Q4: Cell: [REDACTED]

Q5: Home Address: [REDACTED]

Q6: City: [REDACTED]

Q7: Zip: [REDACTED]

### Section 2: Information about the Office you are seeking

Q9: Name of office you are seeking: **House of Delegates**

Q10: District number (If applicable): **36**

Q11: In which political party are you currently registered? (Dem, Rep, , Mountain, Unaffiliated, Other)

**DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE**

Q12: Which political party's nomination(s) are you seeking? (Dem, Rep, , Mountain, Unaffiliated, Other)

**DEMOCRAT**

Q11: Are you an incumbent? **No**

Q12: Are you challenging an incumbent? **Yes**

Q14: Name of Primary Opponent(s) if applicable: **Andrew Robinson, Larry Rowe, Clint Casto, James Peters, Amanda Estep-Burton**

Q15: Name of General Election opponent(s) if known: **Chris Pritt, Matthew Jarret, Ethan Morris**

Q16: Date of Primary Election: **May 8, 2018**

Q17: Date of General Election: **Nov 6, 2018**

### Section 3: Information on your race

Q19: Name of Campaign Committee: **James Elam for House of Delegates 2018**

Q20: Campaign Address : [REDACTED]

Q21: Campaign City: [REDACTED]

Q22: Campaign Zip: [REDACTED]

Q24: Campaign Manager / Point of Contact: [REDACTED]

**844**

Q27: Campaign Website: **www.elamforhouse.com**

Q28: Campaign Facebook: **www.facebook.com/elamforhouse**

Q29: Campaign Twitter: **@elamforhouse**

Q30: Please list all endorsements from unions, progressive organizations and progressive elected officials you have received so far: **1) Endorsed by State Senator and 3rd Congressional District candidate Sen. Richard Ojeda. 2) Endorsed by "The Political Revolution" group, progressive volunteers inspired by the Bernie movement who are pushing to elect progressives to office. 3) Endorsed by former Delegate, State Senator, and gubernatorial Democratic nominee for the 1996 primary, Charlotte Pritt.**

### Section 4: Information about you

Q31: Tell us about who you are and why you are and why you are running.

**I am running for the House of Delegates so everyone will have a seat at the table. Before stepping into the public eye, I was fighting for this State as a Corrections Officer, keeping West Virginians safe from violent offenders. Also, I noticed how many non-violent drug offenders are clogging up our jails and prisons, who would benefit from treatment and rehab—not incarceration. No other candidate has this direct experience of dealing with WV's drug and correctional crisis like I do. I've lived. I'm also running as the youngest openly gay candidate for office, so I'd love to pass EHND (Employment Housing Non-Discrimination Act) and update our Hate Crimes Laws to protect all West Virginians. I want to raise wages higher, repair PEIA permanently, and hopefully expand our MMJ program in WV and fully legalize cannabis. We need to get with the times. We could see tons of jobs and revenue created if we would just have an open mind, plus we've seen in states with successful legal cannabis programs, the rates of opioid abuse drop around 25%.**

Q32: Tell us about your core values and vision.

**I believe in integrity and bravery. How do you act when no one is looking? I don't sell out to the highest bidder, or simply because someone waves a check in my face. I don't think some candidates can say the same, but that's their prerogative. I was taught to be fearless when I was being trained in Corrections, and I've seen a lot of things while working behind bars. My vision is to break this never ending cycle of drug abuse that is tearing apart our communities, businesses and economic development, and more importantly our families.**

Q33: Tell us why you want the Working Families Party endorsement.

**Long before I stepped into the public eye, I was protecting West Virginians from those who seek to harm us. I was also protecting other offenders from one another. I didn't give up when the going got tough, I struggled as a Corrections Officer working 65+ hours a week and only taking home \$900-\$1,000 every two weeks. Also, with respect to the recent teacher walk-out and demands to raise wages for all state/Public employees, I'm the only one running in the district who's ever worked for the State government. I know the problems we are facing, and it is imperative we find funding for this insurance, and make sure we continue to advance our wages to match the rest of the country. For example, even with the 5% pay increase and bonuses for our COs they are still 50th in the nation. We can do so much better!**

Q34: Have you run for office previously? If so, please provide detail.

**I have never run for office before, but I am so honored to have this opportunity now. I am dedicated and fully prepared to serve the people of West Virginia.**

## 1. Democracy: The Rules of the Game

### Fixing Our Democracy

Our democracy is in crisis. Voters are frustrated with the difficulty of simply getting to the polls and casting a ballot, and are beginning to wonder if their vote even matters when millionaires and billionaires have so distorted how political campaigns are financed.

It is past time that state governments respond to American citizens' growing disgust with the difficulty of participating in our most fundamental civic activity -- electing our leaders.

To create a more robust democracy, states should enact reform measures that foster maximum citizen participation. Among these are reforms that make voting easier, that reduce the power of big money in favor of small donor contributions, and that undo the legacy of racism in our voting system.

Voting System Reforms: If not yet law in your state, do you support common-sense legislation that expands the ability of citizens to participate in all elections, including (1) early voting; (2) vote by mail; (3) automatic voter registration; and/or (4) same-day registration?

**YES! All citizens should be able to participate in our political process.**

Public Financing of Elections: In order to combat the dominance of big money in politics, will you support creating a public financing system for legislative and statewide elections throughout your state? **YES — The only people we are beholden to are the people of this great state. Not lobbyists or PACs.**

Rights Restoration: Do you support ex-offender re-enfranchisement? **YES - I am the most experienced candidate in dealing with our offenders. I whole heartedly support this effort.**

Does your campaign accept corporate contributions? **NO!**

## 2. Equality & Freedom

### Reducing Mass Incarceration & Police Reform.

Despite attempts to reform police and criminal justice practices in some communities, discriminatory and abusive policing and mass incarceration remain systemic problems. To make matters worse, the Department of Justice has pledged to ramp up aggressive policing tactics like “stop and frisk.” Trump wants to double down on the failed policies of the War on Drugs era. He has ordered the DOJ to withdraw from “consent decrees” and other efforts to collaborate with localities to reduce discriminatory policing and improve police/community relations.

Poor defendants are unable to pay even small amounts of bail money. As a result, they face pretrial confinement at a much greater rate than other defendants. Do you support “presumptive release” or similar measures for defendants designed to reduce or eliminate the money bail requirement? **YES - So long as we can still guarantee public safety in the event a Pre-Trial felon is to flee.**

Will you support legislation that expands alternatives to incarceration for individuals convicted of nonviolent crimes? **YES YES YES!!! I’ve said it forever, and have seen it first hand: Putting non-violent offenders in the same housing units or general population units as violent offenders, only turns non-violent offenders into violent offenders. Prison is about respect and staying alive. These guys will do anything to make sure they defend themselves, even if it means acting out in ways they used to not behave.**

Substantial research shows that the enforcement of criminal penalties for marijuana possession and use is disproportionately focused on communities of color. Increasingly, states are looking at decriminalizing marijuana. Decriminalization is the removal of criminal penalties for possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use (but not for the sale or distribution of marijuana.) (DPA ACLU)

Will you support legislation to decriminalize marijuana? **YES, 100%**

Will you support legislation to legalize marijuana? **YES! 100% we need to focus on real drugs like heroin and opioids, not wasting time and money on enforcing ineffective marijuana laws. Legalize it!**

### Immigrants & Refugees

The United States has been a beacon of hope for immigrants for centuries. Immigrants are a crucial part of our social and cultural fabric and our economy. But Donald Trump's promise to deport millions of our neighbors, friends, and colleagues has sown widespread fear and anxiety across the country and threatens to tear families and entire communities apart. Meanwhile, evidence shows that attempts to force local and state officials to become de facto immigration agents reduces trust between immigrant communities and the police, making us all less safe.

If federal immigration officials attempt to deport undocumented immigrants from your community, will you directly intervene and advocate with federal officials to stop those deportations?

**YES**

Do you support a state DREAM act, which would allow undocumented children brought to the United States as minors to have access to in-state college tuition rates? **YES, we've publicly protested at Sen. Manchin's office for him to support a Clean Dream Act.**

Do you support granting all state residents who pass the driving test a license regardless of immigration status? **YES**

The Trump administration has attempted to implement his proposed "Muslim ban," threatened to create a Muslim registry and to increase surveillance of law-abiding Muslim communities, and stocked his administration with extreme anti-Muslim demagogues. Working Families Democrats must stand up to religious intolerance and attempts to demonize the Muslim community and Arab and South Asian communities across the country.

How would you use the power of your office to ensure Muslims in your community feel welcome in your community, and are comfortable reporting hate crimes and threats?

**I would let them know I am a supporter of their rights and freedom of religion. They have a right to feel safe, and will publicly advocate to defend their rights. I've been threatened due to my sexuality, and do not tolerate any Hate Crimes what so ever.**

Protecting LGBTQ people.

Discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in our communities persists in spite of recent advances in equality. With Donald Trump's nomination of a conservative Supreme Court Justice and his administration's roll back of protections for LGBTQ individuals at the federal level, it is critical that Working Families Democrats demonstrate progressive leadership in protecting and advancing LGBTQ protections and equality.

Do you support measures that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender expression and identity to ensure that LGBTQ people are protected in your community? **YES - I am the youngest openly gay man to run for the House of Delegates, and I will protect my community AT ALL COSTS.**

### 3. Opportunity & A Fair Economy: Shared Prosperity from the Middle-Out

#### Progressive Taxation

According to a report published by the Federal Reserve in 2016, the richest 1% of families controlled a record-high 38.6% of the wealth in the United States, nearly twice as much as the bottom 90%, which has seen its slice of the pie continue to shrink. The bottom 90% of families now hold just 22.8% of U.S. wealth, down from about one-third in 1989 when the Fed started tracking this measure.

In spite of all of this, Republicans in Congress recently passed a tax bill which is one of the most egregious transfers of wealth from middle class and poor families to the extremely wealthy.

There are many things state governments can do to ensure a more progressive tax code.

Do you support efforts to make the Personal Income Tax more progressive by adding additional high-end earner brackets at increased rates, while reducing the tax rate for low- and middle-income taxpayers? **YES**

Do you support raising the corporate net income tax to 9%, the level it was at before recent pro-business tax cuts, so that the state has more money available for Medicaid, higher education, PEIA and other social programs? **YES**

Do you support raising the natural gas severance tax, which primarily falls on natural gas exported from West Virginia, in order to raise funding for Medicaid, higher education, PEIA and other social programs? **YES**

Do you oppose eliminating the state income tax and replacing it with a regressive sales tax? **YES**

## Education for All

Trump and Betsy DeVos support the privatization of public education that creates profits for some private operators, but inevitably leaves many students behind. Working Families Democrats can take a different approach by investing in high quality public education for all, to enable all children to thrive and reach their full potential-- no matter their zip code.

Will you oppose increased state funding to privately run charter schools and also oppose steps to facilitate the expansion of charter schools in your state?

**YES - we know private charter schools just take money away from the public school system and that is so wrong! All our children deserve a quality education. We need to invest in PUBLIC school systems in WV.**

Will you oppose tax credits for donations to private schools or privately run charter schools? **YES**

Will you support legislation guaranteeing universal pre-K for all children in your state? **YES**

Will you support legislation to eliminate undergraduate tuition at public colleges and universities in your state? **YES - it is a RIGHT to have an opportunity just as everyone else to be educated. NOT A PRIVILEGE!**

How would you propose to raise revenues to fund the Public Employee Insurance Agency (PEIA)?  
**Legalized cannabis, raising the gas severance tax, or realign the soda tax. (Just to name a few)**

## Infrastructure

The Working Families Party helped launch the Millions of Jobs coalition, which has proposed a set of principles to guide any specific jobs and infrastructure legislation. A progressive plan would create millions of jobs in rural, suburban and urban communities with massive investment in repairing roads, bridges, and transit; repairing decaying water systems; building out a 21st century energy infrastructure; and much more. It would be paid for by Wall Street banks, large corporations and the wealthy.

Would you sign this Open Letter to Congress from local elected officials in support of the Millions of Jobs Principles? **YES**

Would you participate in public events to lobby members of Congress to support of the Millions of Jobs Principles? **YES**

## \$15 Minimum Wage

The minimum wage in West Virginia is \$8.75 an hour. A person who works a full time job and makes the minimum wage is still living in poverty.

Will you introduce and support legislation that raises the minimum wage in WV to \$15 an hour and indexes the minimum wage for inflation?

**YES - We can't go on like this, we need higher wages and to keep the cost of living at the same level!  
When our people are making more and are more at peace, our economy is strengthened!**

Will you support eliminating "sub-minimum" wages for tipped workers and create a fair minimum wage for all workers? **YES!**

Will you commit to requiring the payment of prevailing wages to service workers employed on public contracts and subsidized projects? **YES! Plus I'll fight to repeal Right-to-Work.**

## Affordable Housing

All across the country, families are facing an affordable housing crisis, as millions of Americans struggle to afford a home. There is not a single state in the country where a person working full-time at the federal minimum wage can afford a two-bedroom apartment at the local fair-market rent. In many municipalities, blight from the foreclosure crisis continues, even as homeownership remains out of reach for the majority of working families.

Would you introduce or support tenant protections, "just cause" eviction laws, and strong rent regulations to protect tenants from unfair evictions? **YES!**

Do you support efforts to extend legal representation to low-income tenants facing eviction? **YES!**

## Workers' Rights

The United States is the only developed nation without a federal paid family leave program. Nearly all workers need to take time away from work at some point to deal with a serious personal or family illness or to care for a new child, but only 14 percent of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employer, and less than 40 percent have personal medical leave for serious health issues or short-term disability insurance.

No one should face the impossible choice of either caring for their health or keeping their paycheck or job. Yet, at least 41 million private sector workers — 36 percent of the workforce — must make this decision every time illness strikes, because they don't have access to paid sick days.

Will you support paid sick days legislation, which would set a paid sick days standard, allowing workers in businesses with 15 or more employees to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days a year? **YES!**

Will you support legislation which would create a paid family and medical leave insurance program that would provide up to 12 weeks of partially paid leave? **YES!**

Will you oppose any paid leave plan that relies on employer tax credits and voluntary employer action, rather than setting up a true plan that would cover all workers, and will you oppose a plan that jeopardizes existing unemployment insurance benefits and excludes people who need leave to address serious personal or family member illnesses or injuries? **YES!**

The right of workers to organize and collectively bargain for fair contracts is often subject to excessive legal barriers and undermined by well-funded anti-union campaigns. Unions are necessary to counterbalance the power of employers and to defend the interests of workers — they are fundamental to any healthy workforce and to ensure fairness in our democratic system. Elected officials can help workers protect their rights by taking personal stands when labor violations occur, and by ensuring that governments and businesses treat workers fairly.

Will you support repealing West Virginia's "right to work" legislation that makes it harder for working people to unionize? **YES! Right to work legislation is a direct assault on WV workers and an awful piece of legislation. REPEAL!**

Will you support allowing West Virginia public employees to organize under collective bargaining agreements? **YES!**

Will you pledge to use the visibility of your position to publicly support union organizing drives, contract campaigns and strikes? **YES! I was proud to stand with our teachers, State/Public employees, and our Frontier workers represented by the CWA.**

Please describe your past actions and activities that demonstrate a record of commitment to workers' struggles?

**I was proud to stand with our State/Public employees at the Capitol during the Teacher Walkout. Being a former State employee myself, we truly are 55 Strong. I also was proud to picket and meet multiple times with our striking Frontier employees, and was proud to stand with our CWA. Being a former Corrections Officer, I've fought along side the CWA to help our officers and all employees in which this union fights to represent.**

Defending and Expanding Health Care.

We believe that healthcare should be a right, not a privilege. But with healthcare under assault, Working Families Democrats must work overtime to defend healthcare and also seek to expand and improve it where possible.

If Trump succeeds in repealing Obamacare, will you support state and local measures to ensure that residents in your state currently covered by the ACA or by Medicaid do not lose any coverage -- including coverage for contraception, reproductive health, mental health care and prescription coverage?

**YES!! Healthcare is a right not a privilege!**

Will you support a national comprehensive and universal single-payer system of access to health insurance for all residents in your state? **YES!**

Will you commit to oppose any measure that limits women's access to abortion or limits health care coverage for contraceptive care and reproductive health care; and will you use all tools at your disposal to block attempts to impose such limits? **YES! Proud member of the National Organization for Women (NOW), WV NOW, and board member on the Kanawha Valley Chapter of WV NOW. Also have stood multiple times with WV Free (Margaret Pomponio), Planned Parenthood, and the Women's Health Center of WV.**

Please describe your other plans to protect and expand access to quality health care in your state.

**Expand patient access to medical marijuana, from funding from our legal cannabis program we could invest profits from the revenue into our health-care systems across the State.**

State Banks

When the Wall Street house of cards tumbles down, as it did dramatically in 1929 and in 2008, and on a less dramatic scale many times in between, it is Main Street that takes the hit; community banks go under, small businesses lose access to capital, working people lose their jobs, and middle class homeowners lose their homes to foreclosure. An antidote is a state bank that can partner with local community banks and credit unions to keep the local economy healthy. North Dakota has such a bank, which was put in place during the Populist era of the early 20th century, and activists and legislatures in many states have taken note since then.

The Working Families Party has championed state bank proposals in several states, including Oregon, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. Now with the legalization of marijuana in a number of states, and the refusal of the U.S. DOJ to allow legal marijuana proceeds to be deposited in federally insured banks, the case for state banks is stronger than ever.

Would you support legislation for a state bank in your state?

**YES! These banks have effectively killed our medical cannabis program, and we mustn't let this program die! Lives are on the line!**

Personal Property Rights

Do you oppose efforts by natural gas companies to weaken surface owner rights, such as forced pooling and co-tenancy? **YES!**

Strengthening the movement.

Please tell us in which of the following ways you are willing to help build the Working Families Party and the progressive movement. Please check all that apply.

- I will meet with Working Families Party members and leaders at least once per year.
- I will participate in tele-town halls or internet meet ups with WFP members.
- I will encourage my supporters to join the WFP member list serve and join a local chapter.
- I will list the WFP endorsement (and logo, when appropriate) in campaign communications.
- I will publicly describe myself as a Working Families Democrat, Working Families Party-endorsed candidate or Working Families Party member.
- I will join or help form a progressive caucus in the legislature in my state.